
The Education We Don't Like to Talk About

Reminiscences of a Former Academy Student

By Deborah Anfenon-Vance

My academy diploma contains a lot of significant information about my education, but it by no means tells it all. One most important detail it fails to mention is the fact that I rode the school bus, two hours a day for at least ten years. For that I deserve another diploma, but it would have to be rated *X*.

At the time this article was written, Deborah Anfenon-Vance was Assistant Editor of *Insight*. She is currently Assistant Editor of the *Adventist Review*. The article is based on an editorial she wrote for *Insight*, and is used by permission.

Parents and educators would have been naive to underestimate the knowledge we acquired on the school bus, because when school was out their darling children did not cease learning. No, when teacher dismissed us for the day, we went forth to teach one another. In ten years of school busmanship, I was exposed to most of the facts of life that counted (who knows how accurately), plus sufficient extracurricular material to appropriately cover one or two restroom walls.

Of course, I can't credit all of this education to the school bus. Some of it I picked up at recess.

In addition to the standard street vocabulary, we learned what was going on in the community. We found out about divorce, adultery, suicide, incest, shotgun marriages, and unwed mothers. And we didn't have to watch TV or read the newspaper to gather our information, because it was all happening right in our own community. It was the stuff nice parents wished their sweet children didn't know

about or hoped that they at least didn't talk about. But it was part of life, we were curious, and we talked about it.

That was 15 years ago, and I have not noticed that the world or the community has gotten any cleaner or more protected since. If anything has changed, it might be that in addition to sex and violence, students have unemployment and nuclear war to chat about on the school bus.

So why in the world do some people think that teachers, preachers, and writers should discuss only noncontroversial subjects? If students are talking about a topic on the school bus, it seems that the least a responsible adult can do is try for equal time. We didn't always get it right on the school bus because we were literally loaded with misinformation and warped attitudes. We needed an adult to say: "Today we're going to talk about what you've been discussing, and we're going to

get the facts straight."

Those kinds of discussions, when they happened (not often enough), rarely prompted us to go out and sin like mad. To the contrary, frank conversations about *reality* helped us to be more responsible when it came to dealing with reality, because we were more informed. They helped us to live better as Christians because we could see how good Christians handled the sensitive and sordid issues. They gave us the opportunity to understand that the gospel has something to say to our life, even in its most private or painful moments. Some of us even got the idea that the church might be relevant after all.

Of course, I have a specific point in mind when I write these things. Some people wonder what business the academy pastor, the Bible teacher, or the Sabbath school leader has mentioning suicide, divorce, incest, teen pregnancy, or any of those other earthy facts of life. Some even wonder why they bother to talk about movies, music, and clothes, or even discuss "the world" at all. It's as if there's only one side to any of these stories, and that could not possibly be a nice one.

*Parents and educators
would have been
naive to underestimate
the knowledge we
acquired on the
school bus.*

But we can thank God that because the Word was willing to enter this grimy, decadent hole in the universe, there can always be more than one side to any story. If prime-time TV and kids on the school bus get to tell their side,

then an educator or youth leader certainly deserves the chance to tell his or her more worthy and wholesome version. In fact, God expects it.

When the people who work with teens receive pressure "not to talk about those awful things," implied or stated in that pressure is a little text in Philippians that most of us have heard from childhood up:

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8, R.S.V.).*

But this text does not mean that Christians must confine their discussions to rainbows, mountains, Mozart sonatas, and stories about loyal dogs. If you think it does, just look around—not at the world, but at the Bible. Check some of the other subjects Paul, the author of this text, tackled in his writings. Just read an outline of his First Epistle to the Corinthians. There is not much those people hadn't dabbled in, and Paul was certainly not shy to talk about it. So what does this mean? Is incest lovely? Is prostitution pure? Is divorce worthy of praise? In words that Paul so often used, *God forbid*.

Of course, Paul wasn't stuck on sordid subjects, and we shouldn't be, either. But sometimes, in order to be responsible, compassionate, and pastoral—in order to be Christian—teachers and principals have to address them. Something gracious and excellent happens when a young person realizes that the gospel of Jesus stretches as broad as life, that the grace of God goes as far as a school bus, and even our sin. That is something true and honorable, and we must talk about it. □

*From the *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible, copyrighted 1946, 1952 © 1971, 1973.